

WorkFirst Comprehensive Evaluation Program Criteria & Parent Involvement In Decision Making

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This information will be incorporated into CE training curriculum and the WorkFirst Handbook. It is meant to provide policy on the use of program criteria and parental involvement in decision-making. It also provides the context for the use of criteria and parental input in decision-making.

Governor Gregoire's WorkFirst Reform Directive calls for state agencies to *improve the consistency of policy application across the state*.

In order to increase the consistent application of CE policy statewide, the WorkFirst Partners have developed CE Program Standards. To assure consistency and fairness in decision making with parents, the CE Standards require that decisions about participation activities will be made objectively based on program criteria.

At the same time, an essential ingredient of the Comprehensive Evaluation is active participation of parents in the CE process. CE is designed both as an engagement tool and the vehicle to move parents quickly to the most appropriate WorkFirst activity. Parent involvement in the decision-making process is key to a parent's success.

The goal is to increase objectivity in decision-making while increasing parent's involvement in the decision process.

The following CE objectives reflect these concepts:

- Better information about parents' skills and abilities and quicker placement in an employment pathway
- Increased parent involvement in developing their plan for participation, resulting in more parent buy-in and better results
- More consistency in how the program operates across the state through stronger program standards
- More objective decision making based on clearer program criteria
- Placement of parents in the most appropriate activities to move them quickly toward employment and self-sufficiency

Parent Involvement in Decision Making

The term, "client choice" has left the impression with some staff that it is up to the parent to determine what WorkFirst pathway they will participate in. This is a misunderstanding that needs to be addressed in our communication strategy, policy and training. The term "parent involvement in decision making" and similar terms should be used instead of "client choice".

The term "parent involvement" expresses the concept that we want and value the parent's input and we will take their desires and wishes into account when developing a plan with them. Parent input is essential to an effective Comprehensive Evaluation. It is an important factor when deciding what WorkFirst activities a parent will participate in. It is one of the most important engagement strategies we can employ.

However, a parent's wishes alone do not substitute for the comprehensive evaluation and program pathway criteria. Parent input should not be the sole basis for deciding what activity a parent will participate in. A parent's wishes need to be factored into the larger picture, which includes: family and health issues, education, skills & abilities, labor market, availability of training resources etc. Decisions on what pathway a parent participates in must first be made on the basis of program criteria and policy. At that point the parent's wishes should be a major factor in deciding on the pathway choice.

Examples that describe parent involvement include:

- Increased parent involvement in developing their plan for participation, resulting in more parent buy-in and better results
- Parent input in determining what WorkFirst activities they will participate in
- Actively engaging parents in the CE process
- Asking parents what they want to do and working with them to attempt incorporate their wishes into their employment plan
- Trying, if at all possible, to align a parent's wishes with program pathway criteria

The following CE Standards reference parental involvement in decision making:

Standard # 13 states in part:

Parent engagement and active participation in all of the elements, including the interpretation of results, is essential.

Standard # 14 states:

IRPs will be developed with the parents and based on the results and recommendations from the comprehensive evaluation (Employment Plan) and consideration of any special records information. ***Decisions will be made objectively and consistently, based on program policy criteria.***

Program Pathway Criteria

To increase consistency and fairness in decision making with parents, the CE Standards require that all partners use program criteria when developing options, making recommendations and deciding on pathway activities. Partners will document in the CE eJAS screens that pathway criteria were met.

The WorkFirst partners have developed the following program pathway criteria, as part of the CE Standards:

- Criteria for immediate referral of a parent with emergent issues to a social worker
- Criteria for social workers to determine If a parent with emergent issues needs to be deferred from completing the CE
- Criteria for referral to job search
- Criteria for education & training pathway
- Criteria for Community Jobs pathway
- Criteria for placement in a full time X component
- Criteria for completion of an employment plan and recommendations
- Criteria for making decision on pathway activity and IRP

The following CE Standards point out the need for increased objectivity and the use of program criteria in decision-making:

Standard # 2 states:

The elements of the Comprehensive Evaluation will be offered consistently statewide, as described in these standards. Parents will be directed to the evaluation consistently statewide. ***Decisions about parents' employment pathway activities will be made objectively, based on their evaluation results and the criteria for approval.***

Standard # 10 States:

Final decisions about employment pathway activities and other activities will be made after all of the evaluation results are available and the complete picture can be seen. ***Decisions will be made objectively and consistently, based on the program policy criteria.***

Below are the specific program criteria:

Criteria for Immediate Referral of a Parent with Emergent Issues to a Social Worker

All TANF applicants, except LEP pathway, minor parents, child only and exempt (who may volunteer), will be directed to complete the CE. A small number of parents who are unable to immediately complete the CE because of an urgent issue will be directed by the WFPS to a social worker for assessment. The WFPS will document the reason for immediate referral to a social worker using the criteria below.

Definition of a TANF Parent Needing Immediate Referral to a Social Worker: Any parent who discloses or displays severe obstacles that will delay immediate successful participation in the CE process including but not limited to:

- Severe Domestic Violence Issues
- Severe Medical Issues
- Requires immediate entry into in-patient chemical dependency treatment
- Presenting severe mental disorder

Criteria for Social Workers to Determine if a Parent with Emergent Issues Needs to be Deferred from Completing the CE

The social worker will address the immediate need as well as determine whether the parent can complete the remainder of the CE at that time. If the social worker determines that a parent has severe obstacles that will delay immediate successful participation in the CE process, the social worker will temporarily defer the parent from completing the CE and document the reason for the deferral. Reasons for deferral from CE include, but are not limited to:

- Severe Domestic Violence Issues
- Severe Medical Issues
- Requires immediate entry into in-patient chemical dependency treatment
- Presenting severe mental disorder

The parent will be directed to complete the remainder of the CE as soon as he or she is able.

Criteria for referral to Job Search

- Parent must be able to participate at least 20 hours a week
- Parent must be within four weeks of being able to take a job. (For example, parents who are waiting for school to begin in one, two or three months are not appropriate for job search.)
- Exception: For parents who are working full time and want assistance finding a better job, they are appropriate for job search as long as they can come into the office at least once a week to receive assistance. Otherwise, they can be referred to the WorkSource Center as a self-directed job seeker.

Criteria for Education & Training Pathway

ABE/ESL

The *CASAS appraisal* consists of a general assessment of client's literacy level in Adult Basic Skills and/or English as a Second Language. The appraisal is technically designed

to determine the appropriate pre-test to administer to ABE/ESL students (this will typically happen after a student enters an educational pathway). For the purposes of WorkFirst general educational assessment information, along with the interview, the appraisal provides information categorized in the following way:

ABE/ESL CASAS Appraisal Score	Grade Equivalency	Options Include
Less than 220	Less than 6th	Basic skills, family literacy, I-BEST
221-235	6th – 8th	Basic skills, family literacy, I-BEST and CJST
236-245	9th – 10th	ABE for GED completion, family literacy, CJST, and I-BEST
Above 246	11th – 12th	GED completion, family literacy, I-BEST, Vocational Education, HWHD, and additional educational testing as indicated

Vocational Education (VE)

Eligible parents will have a combined time in prior WorkFirst vocational education activities less than 12 months. Parents in this category will have the option for I-BEST, HWHD, or other vocational training up to one year. Additional testing may be necessary to support a VE option in order to match the right parent with the right educational opportunity. ***The following criteria will be used to help identify an appropriate vocational education option.***

- Training and education history indicates parent will successfully complete VE component.
- Parent does not already have sufficient skills and/or training to obtain a living wage job or to lead to a career ladder opportunity.
- Work history suggests no improvement in earnings without training.
- Training would result in a better job or career path within one year.
- Labor market indicates higher wages and demand for the occupation.
- Local training opportunities availability.
- Parent has the skill level to complete program requirements.
- Parent has ability and motivation to enter and complete training.
- Parent has a plan for child care, transportation and other necessary supports to complete training (including back up plans).

Referrals outside of the above criteria need to be documented as part of the Comprehensive Evaluation.

No Educational Pathway

- Parent does not meet criteria for ABE/ESL and/or vocational education
- Parent indicates that he or/ she has no interest in an education pathway at this time

Criteria for Community Jobs (CJ) Pathway

After the parent has completed the Comprehensive Evaluation CJ may emerge as a good choice for parents who:

- Are currently working on issue resolution and are ready to combine issue resolution with work in a supportive setting.
- Are not a viable candidate for placement through Job Search.
- Are receiving intensive services.
- Are interested in curing sanction, if that is the best way to engage the parent in WorkFirst.
- Are ready and able to be employed full-time (32-40 hours per week) within six months of the CJ enrollment.
- Have child care and transportation plans.
- Have known significant mental health and/or substance abuse/chemical dependency issues managed.
- Have not been previously enrolled in the CJ program (exceptions may be requested through CTED).
- Do not currently hold an unsubsidized job.

Criteria for Completion of an Employment Plan and Recommendation

- The ESD worker will conduct the work skill evaluation portion of the comprehensive evaluation to identify current skills and abilities. In addition, ESD will conduct a work values and interests evaluation with each parent.
- The worker will have a one-on-one session with the parent, and discuss how his or her current educational level and work skills equip him or her for the local labor market in terms of potential earnings and career ladders
- The items that will be taken into consideration when building the Employment Plan and recommendations for the employment pathways are:
 - Earning potential and employment options based on his or her current skills and education level
 - What employers in the local labor market hire people with similar skills and which jobs represent the highest paying entry-level jobs available
 - The results from each portion of the comprehensive evaluation, including the foundation, educational, social service assessment, and work skills evaluation
 - How training or additional skill building through employment or structured work activities could enhance the parent's current skill level and earning potential or options for employment
 - If appropriate, limitations on employment and/or training due to prior circumstances, such as felony convictions, and whether there are options for mitigating the circumstances

- The activity options the parent is considering and discussion of how the activities could affect his or her employability in the local labor market (i.e. vocational training, high wage/high demand training, basic education, etc.)
- The criteria for each of the activities and whether the parent and/or the activity meets the criteria for approval

Criteria for Placement in a Full Time X Component

Finding creative ways for the parent to participate without a temporary deferment is usually the best option. Through bundling of services, it is often possible to accommodate a family's special needs while at the same time supporting the parent's employment efforts.

Full time deferment from one of the employment pathways are exceptional cases and occur when the time required to manage an issue makes it difficult for the individual to engage at least part time in an employment pathway. Full deferment from an employment pathway should only occur if the CE reveals issues that preclude participation in any of the employment pathways. Below are examples of reasons for placement in a full time X component.

- Severe Domestic Violence Issues
- Severe Medical Issues
- Requires immediate entry into in-patient chemical dependency treatment
- Presenting severe mental disorder

Supporting documentation explaining why a full time X component is necessary is required for cases where parents are deferred from an employment pathway.

Criteria for Making Decisions on Pathway Activity and IRP

The final decision about employment pathway activities will only be made after all of the Comprehensive Evaluation results are available. Individual Responsibility Plans (IRPs) will be developed with the parent and be based on the CE results and recommendations from the Employment Plan.

In rare cases, after consideration of special records and/or results from the Social Worker assessment, the WFPS may need to develop an IRP that partially or entirely differs from the Employment Plan recommendations. In these cases, the WPS must document a brief justification in eJAS to support an IRP that differs from the recommended employment pathway.

Most often parents who are deferred part-time from an employment pathway can participate in some level of part-time employment related activities while also addressing

other issues that interfere with full-time engagement in an employment pathway.
“Bundling” (or combining) activities to find the best mix of activities for each parent is strongly encouraged.